



# FORESTS and WATER

## *Get the Most Out of Your Land*

### **Our Mission:**

*“Protect and develop healthy sustainable forest resources  
for all Virginians.”*

### **What is Your Mission?**

#### **Attention, Landowner**

The rivers of Virginia are very important resources for the Commonwealth and its citizens. Their rich agricultural land, forest and water resources contribute greatly to the economy, culture and recreation for the Commonwealth. As a landowner, establishing and maintaining the natural resources on your land is important. Here are some interesting facts and information about land management practices. Please share this with your neighbors, friends and family.

#### ***Why Forest Buffers?***

When we speak of forest buffers, we use a language of superlatives... one of the “best” practices for water quality; provides the “greatest” habitat for wildlife; has the “highest” return for the space occupied by the forest buffer, etc.

To understand the reasons forest buffers often get the headlines in water quality conversations, look at the list of benefits they can provide.

#### **Plant A Forest Buffer**

- ◆ Get your money’s worth out of marginal land.
- ◆ Keep your herd healthy and have lower vet bills.
- ◆ Keep the quality of the water in your stream at its best.
- ◆ Enjoy the aesthetic features of your land.

#### ***What’s in Your Stream Water?***

Whether you are a fisherman or just enjoy the taste of the catch, it is saddening to see so many Virginia rivers and streams declared off limits for fishing and swimming. Their waters have become contaminated

with bacteria, chemicals, sediment and other pollutants. Many are watching in anticipation to see how the Chesapeake Bay clean up will turn out. What is important to note is that if we do not continue to clean up local rivers and streams, the likelihood of a clean Bay is quite out of reach. Water quality improvements will take partnerships and cooperation. Who are the partners? They are government agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses and landowners.

There are many government programs offering funds to do the right thing.

- ◆ Put in a fence to get the cattle out of the stream
- ◆ Put in an alternative watering source
- ◆ Install a storm-water facility
- ◆ Plant erosion-control barriers

The list is long, and there is something for everyone. As legislators make decisions about taxes, programs and subsidies, it is not hard to realize government programs are going to change. There is still a commitment to clean up rivers and streams and, at present, there is funding committed to these efforts. This is one of those times when he who hesitates may come up empty handed. The contacts for sources of assistance are located on the back of this publication.



# Get the Most Out of Your Land -

## ***InFOREST***

### **A Tool to Evaluate How Forest Cover Impacts Water and Air Quality**

If you have a computer and Internet access, you, too, can learn about the effects of changing land-use on your particular tract of forest or farmland in Virginia. Developed and maintained by Virginia Department of Forestry, Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and Virginia Tech, funding for this website is provided by Virginia Dominion Power and the USDA Forest Service.

You can view streets and roads, watershed boundaries, topography land cover and, most importantly, your own land. These layers are linked to a conservation value layer that you can use to estimate the value of services provided by various land covers (hay, crop, pasture or forest). The carbon storage and sediment and nutrient reduction brought about by particular conservation practices have economic and environmental value.

## ***Management with a Vision***

With trending weather conditions of wet springs and dry, hot summers, knowing what crop will do best is an exercise combining experience and common sense. Each year, subtle changes in our landscapes can occur. Some indicators of changes to observe are: whether or not the scouring of the stream bank is worse this year; have rills of erosion become gullies; are there new low wet areas, and are there changes from wind, water, drought or overuse. A survey of property will reveal subtle changes in areas where a change in management would improve efficiency and productivity.

A second pair of eyes can also help with management decisions. Develop a management plan that will start with the present use and move into the future, while keeping your economic, cultural and environmental visions. If you already have a management plan, check it every season and anticipate the potential need to alter plans to meet all of your management objectives. You may find through this process that areas of your property could be improved by not cropping portions of a field that are marginally productive. To get a management plan, call your local natural resource agencies for a review of your property. The Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Virginia Department of Forestry and Cooperative Extension can assist you.



A network of forest buffers.  
*Photo Courtesy of Libby Norris, Chesapeake Bay Foundation*

## ***Forestry for the Bay***

Another way to develop a management plan for your wooded land is to go on-line to Forestry for the Bay ([forestryforthebay.org](http://forestryforthebay.org)). At this site, you will be prompted by questions to review your land-use and management practices. The end product will be a report with suggestions to make the best use of your land, particularly the forest. The suggestions will lead to stewardship and management practices that will improve productivity. You will also be able to find out about workshops, topics of interest and landowners with common interests.

***Is the river or stream in  
your watershed healthy?***

***Find out at  
[deq.virginia.gov](http://deq.virginia.gov)***

***Select Draft 2012 305(b)/303(d)  
Water Quality Assessment  
Integrated Report***

# Forests and Water



This InFOREST project (purple area) using a land-use change of three acres of hay planted to trees showed a nitrogen reduction of 21.39 lbs./year, phosphorus 2.43 lbs./year and sediment 23 tons/year.

## Riparian Buffer Tax Credit

This particular tax credit is specific to landowners with forestland. If you are planning on a timber harvest, this tax credit may apply to you. The following are some key criteria for eligibility:

- ◆ You must be a Virginia taxpayer.
- ◆ The parcel for harvest must be at least 10 acres.
- ◆ There must be a riparian buffer along the stream within the parcel.
- ◆ Eligibility is for the year in which the harvest was completed.
- ◆ The tax credit can be carried over for up to five years.
- ◆ The credit equals 25 percent of the value of the timber retained as a riparian buffer with a limit of \$17,500.

To learn more about this tax credit, visit [dof.virginia.gov](http://dof.virginia.gov) or contact your local area forester. For other forest tax tips, request Agriculture Handbook 718 from: [timbertax.org](http://timbertax.org).

## New Opportunities for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

The Virginia Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a long-standing partnership program between USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Through this partnership, the program is now able to offer up to 100 percent cost-share assistance to participants who agree to implement riparian forest buffers on eligible land.

The voluntary program provides financial and technical assistance to participants who agree to implement certain conservation practices on eligible agricultural land. Since 2000, CREP has improved water quality and restored and enhanced habitat for wildlife on more than 30,000 acres in Virginia. In July 2015, Virginia increased its investment in CREP, allowing FSA and its partners to more effectively target highly sensitive riparian areas for enrollment to conserve natural resources across the Commonwealth.

Landowners may offer land for enrollment in CREP at any time. Enrollment is continuous and noncompetitive. CREP offers several flexible options to assist and support farmers and landowners with achieving their conservation goals. Participants who agree to plant trees under certain conservation practices along eligible water features may earn up to 100 percent cost-share assistance from FSA and its partners.

In addition to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) and 47 independent Soil and Water Conservation Districts also partner with FSA in support of CREP. NRCS and VDOF provide custom, on-site technical assistance by developing a Conservation Plan and a Tree Planting Plan. DCR contributes the enhanced financial assistance, delivered through the local SWCDs.

Farmers may visit their local USDA Service Center for additional information or to submit an offer. Submitting an offer is a nonbinding request to begin the enrollment process and development of a Conservation Plan. The Virginia Agricultural Cost-Share Program (BMP Program) may also offer additional assistance to address resource concerns on grazing lands.

For more information about CREP, visit your local FSA office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>



*What is Your Mission for Your Land and its Natural Resources? Contact your local forester for assistance in developing a plan to meet your mission.*



Virginia Department of Forestry  
900 Natural Resources Drive, Suite 800  
Charlottesville, VA 22903

*Call your local forester about  
a forest management plan,  
implementing a forest buffer or  
tree planting.*

## Resources

- ◆ Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) for all your forestry questions, including tree species information and sales: [www.dof.virginia.gov](http://www.dof.virginia.gov)
- ◆ Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for local Soil and Water Conservation District information: [www.dcr.virginia.gov](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov)
- ◆ Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for local Service Center locations and staff to answer all agriculture-related questions: [www.va.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.va.nrcs.usda.gov)
- ◆ Virginia Cooperative Extension for local Extension office locations, publications on horticulture, gardening and farm information: [ext.vt.edu](http://ext.vt.edu)
- ◆ Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for questions about water quality, chemical and other pollutant spills, storm water, stream degradation: [www.deq.virginia.gov](http://www.deq.virginia.gov)
- ◆ Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) for wildlife habitat and management: [www.dgif.virginia.gov](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov)
- ◆ Farm Service Agency for local office locations and information about programs, including CRP and CREP: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=va&agency=fsa>



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